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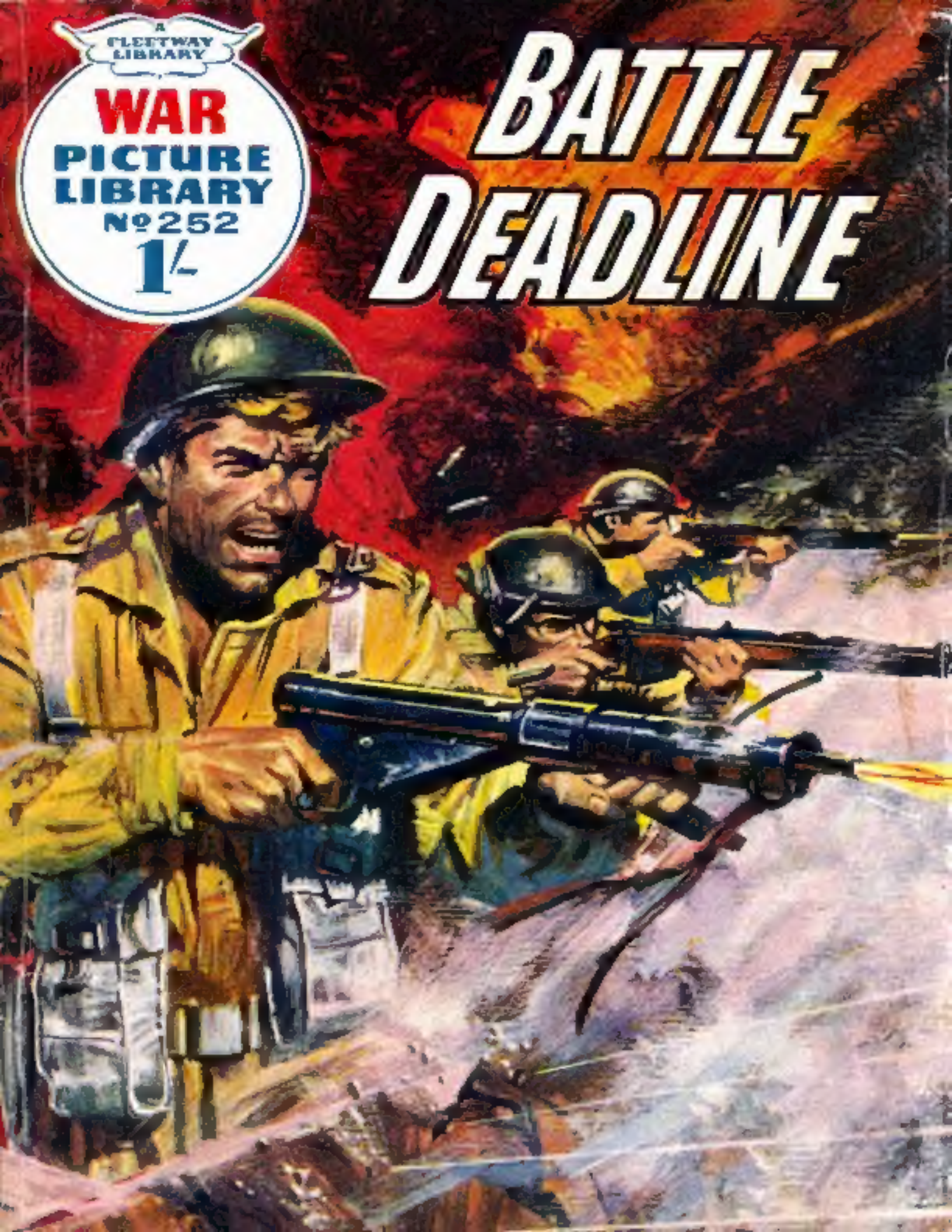
BATTLE DEADLINE



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BATTLE DEADLINE

IN THE BITTER WINTER OF 1944, WHEN THE BRITISH ARMY WAS SLOGGING FORWARD TO THE RHINE, THE EDITORIAL STAFF OF THE ARMY NEWSPAPER *"BATTLE FLAG"* WERE IN PARIS THREE HUNDRED MILES AWAY FROM THE BATTLEFRONT. FROM PARIS, THE WAR LOOKED VERY GLAMOROUS INDEED ...

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W.P.L.—252

Chapter 1. Rousing Stuff

TOWARDS THE END OF DECEMBER, 1944, THE OFFICER COMMANDING THE BRITISH DIVISION, GENERAL CALDICOTT, MADE A PERSONAL TOUR OF THE FORWARD AREAS.

I SAY, SIR! I - I THINK WE'RE BEING SHELLED!

THAT'S REMARKABLY OBSERVANT OF YOU, SMITHERS! HAND ME MY HELMET!

THE GENERAL WAS A MAN WHO BELIEVED IN SEEING THINGS FOR HIMSELF.

YOU - YOU DON'T THINK WE'VE GOT NEAR ENOUGH TO THE FRONT, DO YOU, SIR?

NO, SMITHERS, I DO NOT. WHEN I ATTEND THE CONFERENCE IN PARIS NEXT WEEK, I HAVE TO REPORT ON THE MORALE OF MY TROOPS. I MUST SEE THEM IN ACTION FIRST. CARRY ON, DRIVER.

THE BATTLEFRONT WAS A FLUID ONE, IN EVERY SENSE OF THE WORD. THE FIELDS ALONG THE DUTCH BORDER WERE WATERLOGGED. THE FIGHTING WAS CONFUSED.
WHAT'S WRONG, DRIVER?
I SEEM TO HAVE MISLAID A COUPLE OF BATTALIONS OF INFANTRY, SIR. ACCORDING TO THE MAP...
DON'T DRIVEL, MAN. WHAT YOU MEAN IS, WE'RE LOST.

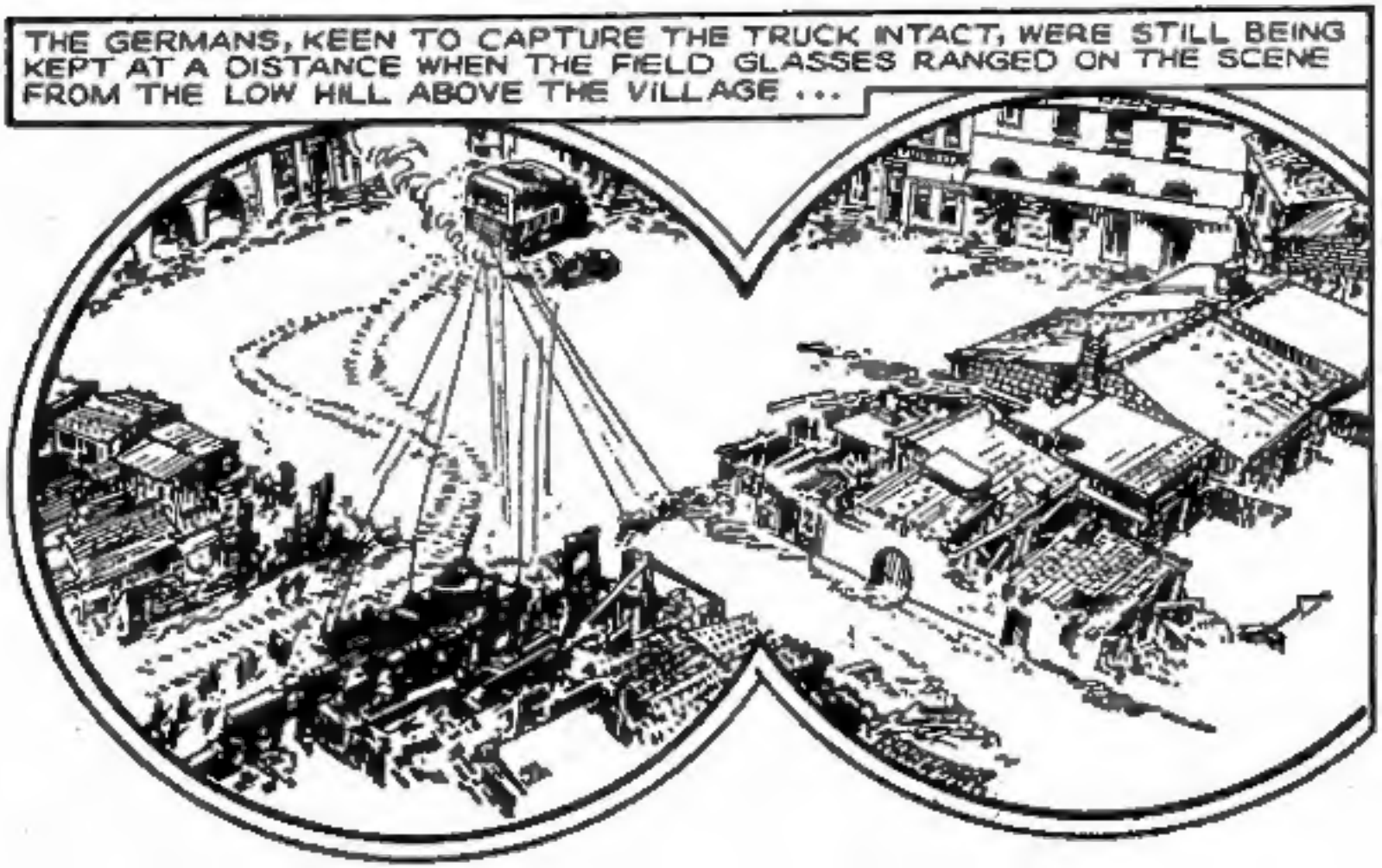
THE STAFF CAR WAS STILL WANDERING AIMLESSLY ACROSS THE FLOODED BATTLEFIELD WHEN THE THREE-TONNER APPEARED FROM A SIDE ROAD AHEAD ...
AH, ONE OF OUR SUPPLY TRUCKS! IT SEEMS TO KNOW WHERE IT'S GOING, TOO. FOLLOW THAT TRUCK, DRIVER!
3

THREE MILES FARTHER ON, A RUINED VILLAGE CAME INTO SIGHT. THERE WERE SOLDIERS LOUNGING AROUND A TANK IN THE STREET.
AH, FRONT LINE TROOPS AHEAD BY THE LOOK OF IT, SIR.
QUITE SO, SMITHERS, PASS ME MY CAP, WILL YOU? MUST SET AN EXAMPLE OF CONFIDENCE TO THE CHAPS, EH?

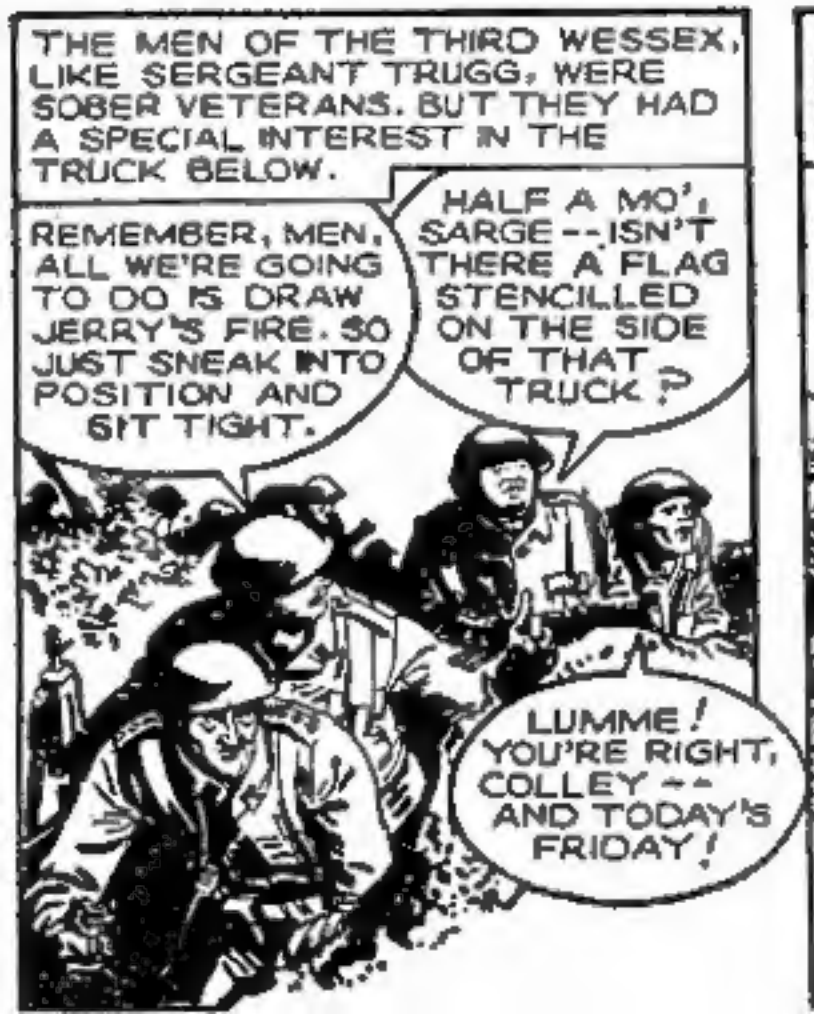
THE GENERAL'S AIDE HAD BEEN QUITE RIGHT. THEY WERE FRONT LINE TROOPS IN THE VILLAGE. THE ONLY TROUBLE WAS—THEY WERE GERMANS!
ACH, ENGLANDERS!
HEY! I THOUGHT YOU SAID THE WESSEX RIFLES GRABBED THIS PLACE YESTERDAY, TOSH?
THEY DID, CHARLIE— THE JERRIES MUST HAVE GRABBED IT BACK AGAIN. PUT YOUR FOOT DOWN!

Battle Deadline

THE GENERAL, HIS AIDE AND HIS DRIVER PILED INTO THE BACK OF THE TRUCK.
UUH! GOOD HEAVENS-- PAPER!
WHAT A REMARKABLY KEEN EYE YOU HAVE, SMITHERS! JUST APPLY IT TO A RIFLE, WILL YOU?


THE GERMANS, KEEN TO CAPTURE THE TRUCK INTACT, WERE STILL BEING KEPT AT A DISTANCE WHEN THE FIELD GLASSES RANGED ON THE SCENE FROM THE LOW HILL ABOVE THE VILLAGE ...

THE OFFICER HOLDING THE FIELD GLASSES WAS CAPTAIN LIVERMORE, OF THE THIRD WESSEX RIFLES, LEADING A SECTION OF HIS COMPANY ON RECCE PATROL.
TRUST SOME SILLY CLOTS TO GET THEMSELVES INTO TROUBLE! I SUPPOSE WE'LL HAVE TO STICK OUR NECKS OUT FOR THEM, SIR?
GET A RUNNER BACK TO B.H.Q., SAR'NT. WE'LL JUST DIVERT JERRY'S ATTENTION WHILE BRIGADE WHISTLES UP A FULL-SCALE ATTACK.


THE MEN OF THE THIRD WESSEX, LIKE SERGEANT TRUGG, WERE SOBER VETERANS. BUT THEY HAD A SPECIAL INTEREST IN THE TRUCK BELOW.
REMEMBER, MEN, ALL WE'RE GOING TO DO IS DRAW JERRY'S FIRE. SO JUST SNEAK INTO POSITION AND SIT TIGHT.
HALF A MO', SARGE -- ISN'T THERE A FLAG STENCILLED ON THE SIDE OF THAT TRUCK?
LUMME! YOU'RE RIGHT, COLLEY -- AND TODAY'S FRIDAY!

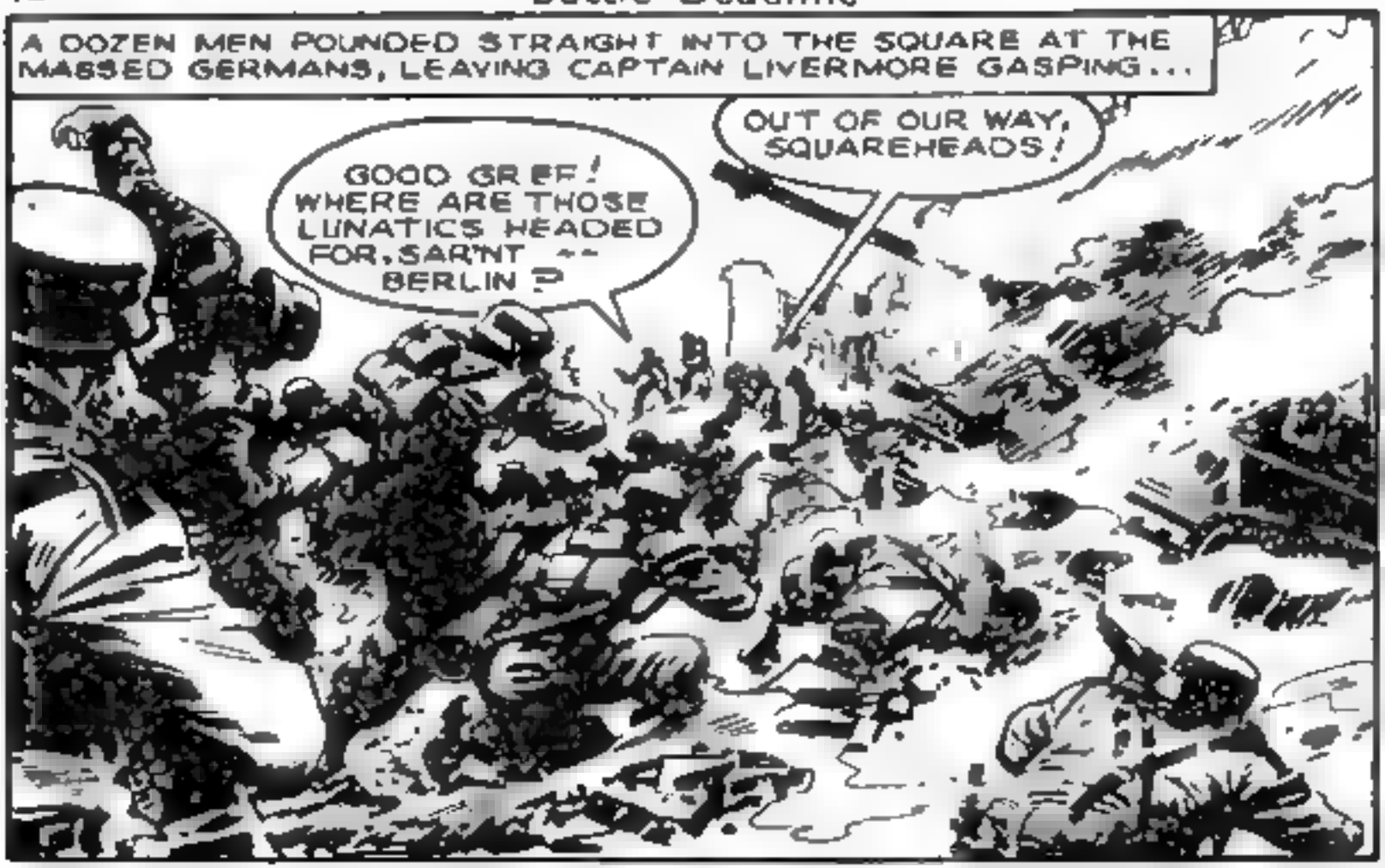
THE MEN SCRAMBLED ON TO THE ROAD, UNSLINGING THEIR GUNS. THEY SURGED PAST CAPTAIN LIVERMORE BEFORE HE COULD STOP THEM.
COME ON, BLOKES! JERRY'S NOT SPOILING MY WEEKEND IF I CAN HELP IT!
WE'RE WITH YOU, COLLEY! STRAIGHT DOWN THE ROAD, MATES!
ARE YOU MEN CRAZY? THERE'S A TANK AND AT LEAST A COMPANY OF GERMANS IN THAT VILLAGE!

THE GERMANS, AND GENERAL CALDICOTT, SAW THE ADVANCING THIRD WESSEX SECTION AT THE SAME MOMENT.
ACH! THE ENGLANDERS ATTACK FROM THE REAR!
ACHTUNG! TRAVERSE RIGHT!
GREAT SCOTT! I'M BEING RESCUED!

CAPTAIN LIVERMORE'S MEN WERE OUTNUMBERED BY FOUR TO ONE AND THE PANZER WAS CLOSE WITH ITS FIRST SHELL. BUT THEY KEPT GOING.
HERE -- GIVE US THAT PIAT, TOSH! SKIRMISH ALONG THE FLANKS, YOU LOT, WHILE I NAIL THAT TANK!

PRIVATE COLLEY STEADIED THE SIGHTS OF THE ANTI-TANK WEAPON ON THE PANZER, IGNORING THE BLAST OF THE SECOND SHELL.
I'VE GOT TO HIT THE BLIGHTER FIRST TIME... OR BANG GOES THE TRUCK AND WHAT'S INSIDE IT!

THE PIAT'S FIRST ROUND SCORED A DIRECT HIT ON THE NAZI TANK. THE THIRD WESSEX SECTION ROSE AS ONE MAN.
AAAGH!
SPOT ON, COLLEY! UP AND AT 'EM, BLOKES! BUT KEEP YOUR BULLETS AWAY FROM THAT TRUCK!


A DOZEN MEN POUNDED STRAIGHT INTO THE SQUARE AT THE MASSED GERMANS, LEAVING CAPTAIN LIVERMORE GASPING...
GOOD GREF! WHERE ARE THOSE LUNATICS HEADED FOR, SARNT -- BERLIN?
OUT OF OUR WAY, SQUAREHEADS!

FROM THE TAILBOARD OF THE TRUCK, GENERAL CALDICOTT WATCHED THE ATTACK WITH ASTONISHMENT AND PRIDE.
AAAGH!
CLOBBER THEM, THE THIRD!
MY WORD, SMITHERS, I WOULDN'T HAVE BELIEVED THIS IF I HADN'T SEEN IT WITH MY OWN EYES! A HANDFUL OF OUR GALLANT LADS DEFYING FEARFUL ODDS TO RESCUE THEIR GENERAL!

THE VENOM OF THE THIRD WESSEX RIFLEMEN MADE UP FOR THEIR LACK OF NUMBERS. THE GERMANS WILTED AND BROKE.
ACH! THESE ARE DEVILS! LAY DOWN YOUR WEAPONS, KAMERADS!
OKAY, BLOKES -- PANIC OVER. LET'S GET WHAT WE CAME FOR OUT OF THAT TRUCK!

GENERAL CALDICOTT BEAMED AT HIS RESCUERS. THE ONLY SNAG WAS THAT IT WAS NOT THE GENERAL THEY HAD COME TO RESCUE.
SPLENDID WORK, MEN! YOUR GENERAL IS PROUD OF YOU!
OKAY, TOSH ANOTHER TIME, EH?
THEY'RE HERE, COLLEY!

IT WAS THE NEWSPAPERS WHICH WERE STACKED INSIDE THE TRUCK!
SMASHING FRONT PAGE STORY THIS WEEK, TOSH -- LONE NERO ROUTS PANZER ARMY -- WITH ACTION PHOTOGRAPHS!
LOOK AT THIS -- DEATH-OR-GLORY CHARGE BY SUICIDE TROOPS -- FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.
WHAT THE DEUCE -- DON'T LET ME DISTURB YOU, MEN!

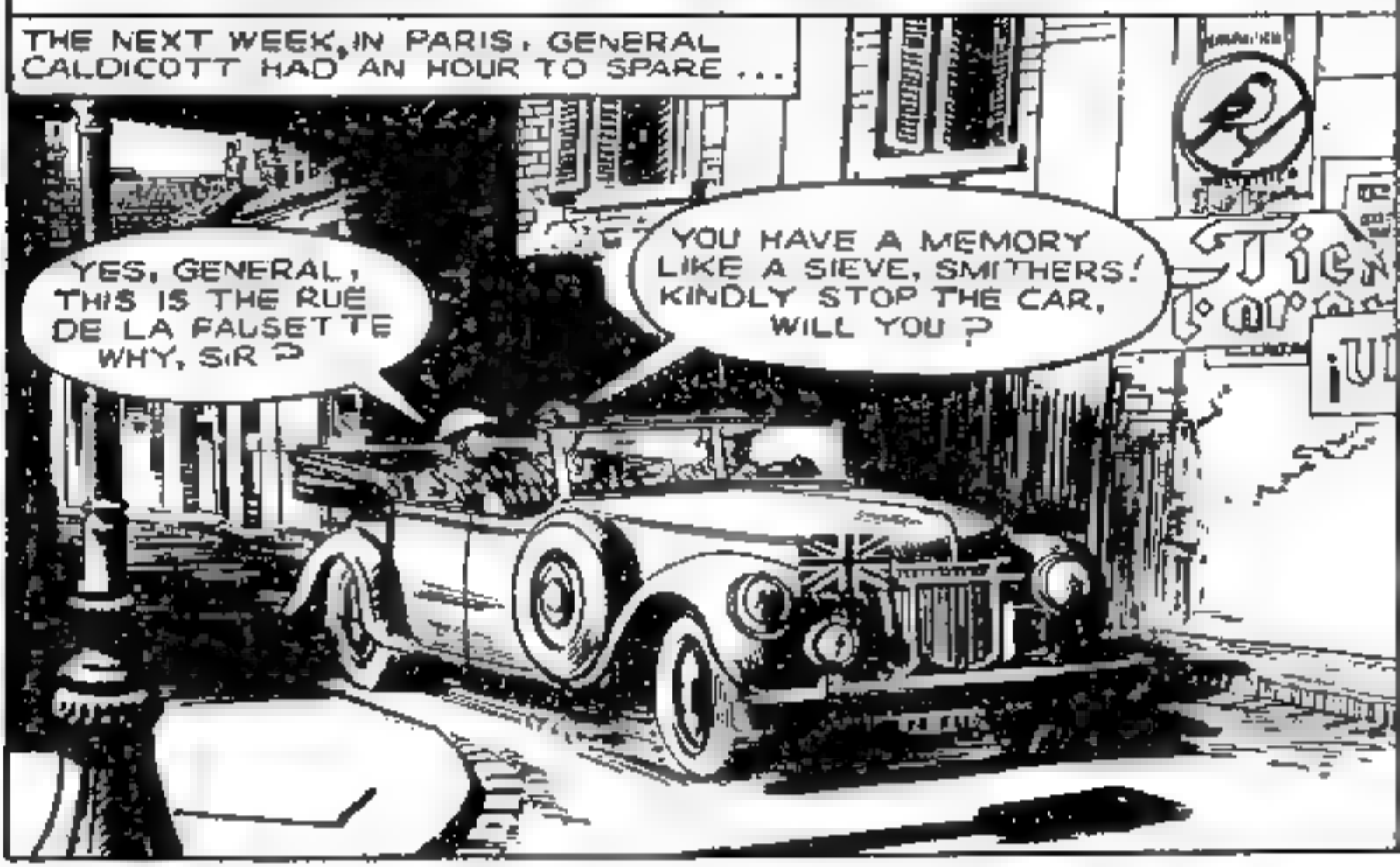
GENERAL CALDICOTT CLIMBED UNNOTICED FROM THE TRUCK. HE SOUGHT ENLIGHTENMENT...
OH GOSH -- IT'S GENERAL CALDICOTT! WE DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE HERE, SIR!
SO I GATHER, CAPTAIN! WOULD YOU BE KIND ENOUGH TO EXPLAIN WHAT IS HAPPENING? WHAT IS THIS READING MATTER YOUR MEN FIND SO ENGROSSING?

CAPTAIN LIVERMORE DID HIS BEST TO EXPLAIN.
WELL, SIR, IT'S CALLED BATTLE FLAG! IT'S AN ARMY NEWSPAPER. THE MEN GET IT UP HERE AT THE FRONT LINE EVERY FRIDAY IT'S PRETTY POPULAR WITH THEM, SIR!
IT MUST BE CAPTAIN, IF THEY'LL TAKE ON HALF THE GERMAN ARMY RATHER THAN MISS AN ISSUE! WELL, COME ON, LET ME SEE A COPY..
BATTLE FLAG
LONE HERO ROUTS PANZER ARMY
DEATH-OR-GLORY CHARGE BY SUICIDE TROOPS

GENERAL CALDICOTT RAN A KEEN EYE OVER THE FLARING PAGES OF THE BATTLE FLAG.
BY JINGO! ROUSING STUFF THIS, CAPTAIN! NO WONDER THE MEN LAP IT UP! FELLOWS WHO WRITE IT MUST BE LIVEWIRES. ALWAYS ON THE SPOT WHERE THE ACTION'S THICKEST! LET ME SEE -- IT'S EDITED FROM PARIS...
BATTLE FLAG
PANZER ARMY
DEATH-OR-GLORY CHARGE BY SUICIDE TROOPS

THE GENERAL WAS A MAN WHO LIKED TO SEE THINGS FOR HIMSELF.
I TELL YOU WHAT, CAPTAIN -- I'M ATTENDING A CONFERENCE IN PARIS NEXT WEEK. WHILE I'M THERE, I'LL LOOK INTO THE BATTLE FLAG OFFICE! IT SHOULD PROVE AN INTERESTING EXPERIENCE

Chapter 2. Behind the Scenes



THE GENERAL HAD BEEN RIGHT. THE VISIT TO THE BATTLE FLAG OFFICES LOOKED LIKE PROVING A VERY INTERESTING EXPERIENCE INDEED ...
AAAAGH!
UUUUUH!
GREAT SCOTT! WHAT THE DEUCE?

IN THE PEACEFUL HEART OF THE CITY, A FIERCE BATTLE WAS APPARENTLY BEING FOUGHT.
OH MY WORD, S-SIR-- B-BUT THIS IS P-PARIS!
AND THESE ARE GERMANS, SMITHERS, SO STOP WAFFLING! ACT FIRST AND ASK QUESTIONS AFTERWARDS! HAVE AT YOU, FRITZ!

AS THE GENERAL CLENCHED HIS FIST, A FLASHBULB POPPED...
OHH--~ I SAY...
UUUUH!
HOLD IT THERE, BUSTER! THIS'LL MAKE THE FRONT PAGE!

THE PHOTOGRAPHER GRINNED CHEERFULLY.
TARNATION, SIR! WOULD YOU KINDLY EXPLAIN..?
YOU CAN DROP THE ACT NOW! I DON'T KNOW HOW CHARLIE'S GOING TO WORK A FULL-BLOWN GENERAL INTO THIS STORY, BUT YOU SHOULD BE WORTH A HEADLINE!

THE GERMAN SOLDIER HAD A FLUENT COMMAND OF ENGLISH.
PERHAPS WE SHOULD INTERROGATE THE PRISONER, SIR! SPRECHEN SIE ENGLISCH, GEFANGENER?
BELT UP, MATE--AND TELL THAT OLD COOT NOT TO SLOSH A BLOKE SO HARD NEXT TIME!

GENERAL CALDICOTT PLOUGHED GRIMLY ACROSS THE BATTLEFIELD.
KILL THAT SMOKE, PERCY! I WANT SOME PANORAMIC VIEWS NOW! HOT UP THE ACTION, FELLERS!
B-BUT WHAT'S G-GOING ON, SIR?
YOU MAY WELL ASK, SMITHERS! I'M BEGINNING TO HAVE MY SUSPICIONS! FOLLOW ME...

SHOOTING IN PROGRESS. KINDLY KEEP OUT UNTIL BATTLE IS OVER. EDITOR.
DASH IT ALL, SIR, THIS ISN'T A REAL BATTLE AT ALL -- IT'S A FAKE! BUT WHAT ON EARTH IS IT IN AID OF?
THE NEXT ISSUE OF BATTLE FLAG, SMITHERS, THAT'S WHAT! THOSE STIRRING ACTION PHOTOS THEY PUBLISH EVERY WEEK ARE TAKEN HERE, IN THIS VERY COURTYARD, TWO HUNDRED MILES BEHIND THE LINES!

THE GENERAL PAUSED OUTSIDE AN OPEN DOOR IN THE OFFICES ABOVE THE COURTYARD.
SSH, SMITHERS! LISTEN ...
I AM WRITING THIS CROUCHED IN A FOXHOLE A COUPLE OF BAYONET-THRUSTS FROM THE GERMAN LINES! THE SHELLBURSTS ARE JOGGING MY HAND! BULLETS ARE WHISTLING OVERHEAD! EVERY WORD MAY BE MY LAST...

GENERAL CALDICOTT'S EYES BULGED
UP HERE IN THE FRONT LINE, IT'S MUD, BLOOD AND SWEAT AS WE WAIT TO GO OVER THE TOP! THE WIND FREEZES OUR BODIES, BUT THE FIRE OF BATTLE BURNS HOT IN OUR VEINS!
TCHAH!

THE LITTLE REPORTER PUT DOWN H'S CUP OF TEA AND GRINNED AT THE GENERAL.
DID YOU SAY SOMETHING, FRIEND?
I SAID TCHAH! YOU SIT HERE AS SNUG AS A BUG IN A RUG AND YOU WRITE THAT POPPYCOCK ..

GENERAL CALDICOTT HAD SEEN ENOUGH.
HERE, HAVE A HEART, FRIEND! THIS ISN'T POPPYCOCK! IT'S THE FRONT PAGE STORY FOR THIS WEEK'S BATTLE FLAG!
FRONT PAGE STORY, EH? FAIRY STORY, MORE LIKE IT! BY GAD, I'LL GIVE THAT EDITOR OF YOURS A PIECE OF MY MIND!

THE GENERAL FOUND THE EDITOR OF BATTLE FLAG IN THE CORRIDOR...
TOR
THIS PHOTO NEEDS A SPOT OF ART-WORK, FRED. I WANT THIS CHAP TO BE WAVING A FLAG OR SOMETHING. AFTER ALL, HE'S SUPPOSED TO BE LEADING THIS TERRIFIC CHARGE...
OKAY, MISTER BRIGHT. YOU'RE THE EDITOR...
AHA!

THE EDITOR PATTED GENERAL CALDICOTT'S SHOULDER SYMPATHETICALLY.
YOU, SIR! DO I UNDERSTAND THAT YOU'RE THE EDITOR OF THIS--THIS NEWSPAPER?
THAT'S RIGHT, OLD MAN. YOU MUST BE THE TWO-FISTED BRASSHAT TYPE THAT ED WAS TELLING ME ABOUT! WELL, IT WAS A GOOD ACT, BUT I DOUBT IF WE CAN WANGLE YOU INTO THIS WEEK'S STORY...

I MEAN, IT'D BE A BIT FAR-FETCHED TO SHOW A GENERAL RISKING HIS SKIN NEAR THE FIRING LINE. WE CAN'T EXPECT OUR READERS TO SWALLOW THAT ONE, CAN WE?
I-TCHAH - I-DASH IT!

WORDS FAILED GENERAL CALDICOTT.
I SAY, YOUR PAL REALLY GETS CARRIED AWAY BY HIS PART, DOESN'T HE? YOU'D THINK HE ACTUALLY WAS A PEPPERY OLD GENERAL!
BUT DASH IT, HE IS A PEPPERY OLD GENERAL! THAT IS ... I MEAN ... OH LOR' ...
EDITOR

BUT GENERAL CALDICOTT WAS MADE OF STERN STUFF
ENOUGH OF THIS TOMFOOLERY, SIR! I AM GENERAL CALDICOTT. I CAME HERE TO SEE HOW THIS NEWSPAPER WAS RUN.
YOU ARE? YOU DID? I SAY, SIR, I HOPE YOU'VE BEEN FAVOURABLY IMPRESSED...

..AND HIS TEMPER HAD BEEN SORELY TRIED IN THE LAST HALF-HOUR
SIR, I HAVE BEEN SCANDALISED! YOU CALL THIS A NEWSPAPER? I CALL IT A TWOPENNY BLOOD! FROM COVER TO COVER THIS BATTLE FLAG OF YOURS, IS NOTHING BUT A FAKE! COME, SIR, I'LL SHOW YOU WHAT I MEAN...

HE DRAGGED THE EDITOR TO A WINDOW OVERLOOKING THE COURTYARD...
THERE, SIR! THOSE BATTLE PHOTOGRAPHS YOU PUBLISH! TAKEN IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD, SIR! FAKES!
OH, I SAY.

THEN HE DRAGGED OSWALD BRIGHT TO THE DOOR OF THE REPORTER'S ROOM.
THIS REPORTER OF YOURS, AND HIS BATTLE REPORTS! WRITTEN WITH HIS FEET ON THE DESK, SIR! FAKES!
HERE, STEADY ON...

THE EDITOR, THE REPORTER AND THE PHOTOGRAPHER LISTENED WITH OPEN MOUTHS
NO, SIR, MY MIND IS MADE UP! YOU AND YOUR STAFF SHALL FIND OUT WHAT BATTLE REALLY IS LIKE! I AM DRAFTING YOU TO THE FRONT LINE AT ONCE!
PHEW! HE REALLY IS A GENERAL!
THAT WAS HOW THE THREE MAN EDITORIAL STAFF OF BATTLE FLAG WENT TO WAR.
LET'S SEE WHAT SORT OF A NEWSPAPER THESE JOHNNIES WILL PRODUCE UNDER ENEMY FIRE, EH, SMITHERS?
ALL RIGHT, GENERAL! IF THAT'S THE WAY IT IS--LET'S SEE!

Chapter 3. Back Page Story

A WEEK OR TWO LATER, THE THREE NEWSPAPERMEN REACHED THE BRITISH FORWARD POSITIONS ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE REICHSWALD FOREST.

I SAY, OLD MAN, WE'RE LOOKING FOR THE WESSEX RIFLES ...

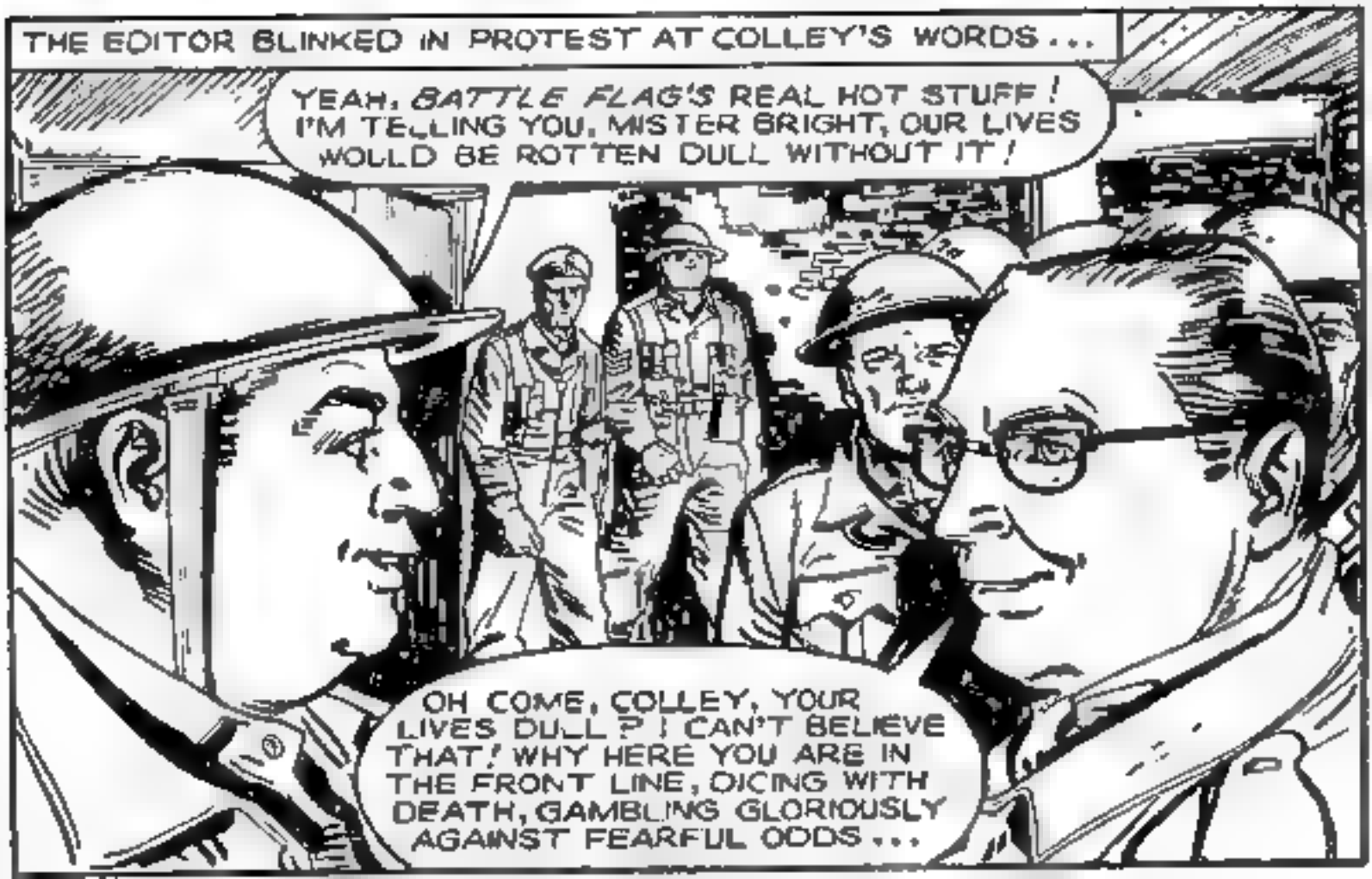
YOU CAN STOP LOOKING THEN, MATE THEY'RE INSIDE THAT BARN ...

THE MEN OF THE THIRD WESSEX RIFLES HAD COME A LONG, HARD WAY FROM THE DUTCH BORDER

HELLO, THERE! WE'VE BEEN POSTED TO 'D' COMPANY...

HAVE YOU, TOSH? WELL, YOU CAN'T BE LUCKY ALL THE TIME! MY NAME'S COLLEY.

PRIVATE COLLEY STUCK OUT A FRIENDLY HAND...
MY NAME'S BRIGHT--AND THIS IS CHARLIE SAGE--AND ED LEMMON! ACTUALLY WE'RE THE STAFF OF BATTLE FLAG...
YOU ARE? WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY SO BEFORE! COR, THIS IS AN HONOUR FOR 'D' COMPANY!


THE EDITOR BLINKED IN PROTEST AT COLLEY'S WORDS...
YEAH, BATTLE FLAG'S REAL HOT STUFF! I'M TELLING YOU, MISTER BRIGHT, OUR LIVES WOULD BE ROTTEN DULL WITHOUT IT!
OH COME, COLLEY, YOUR LIVES DULL? I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT! WHY HERE YOU ARE IN THE FRONT LINE, DICING WITH DEATH, GAMBLING GLORIOUSLY AGAINST FEARFUL ODDS...

CAPTAIN LIVERMORE'S ANNOUNCEMENT DELIGHTED THE LITTLE MAN.
SORRY TO BUTT IN, CHAPS, BUT YOU'D BETTER GET SOME SHUT-EYE! WE'RE LEADING THE ATTACK ON THE REICHSWALD FOREST AT DAWN TOMORROW
THERE YOU ARE! WHAT DID I SAY? ATTACK AT DAWN! HOW TERRIFIC!

OSWALD BRIGHT SAW THE WAR IN TERMS OF LURID HEADLINES.
I SAY, CAPTAIN, CAN I CARRY THE FLAG INTO BATTLE TOMORROW?
ARE YOU TRYING TO BE FUNNY, MY MAN?
ER NO, SIR-- HE ISN'T! PERHAPS I COULD EXPLAIN...

CAPTAIN LIVERMORE GRINNED SARDONICALLY.
THOSE THREE BLOKES RUN THAT WILD NEWSPAPER, CAPTAIN! THE GENERAL SIGNALLED G H.Q. HE WAS GOING TO ATTACH THEM TO US.
I REMEMBER! WELL, THEY'LL BE LUCKY IF THEY GET ANY FRONT PAGE NEWS OUT OF 'D' COMPANY.

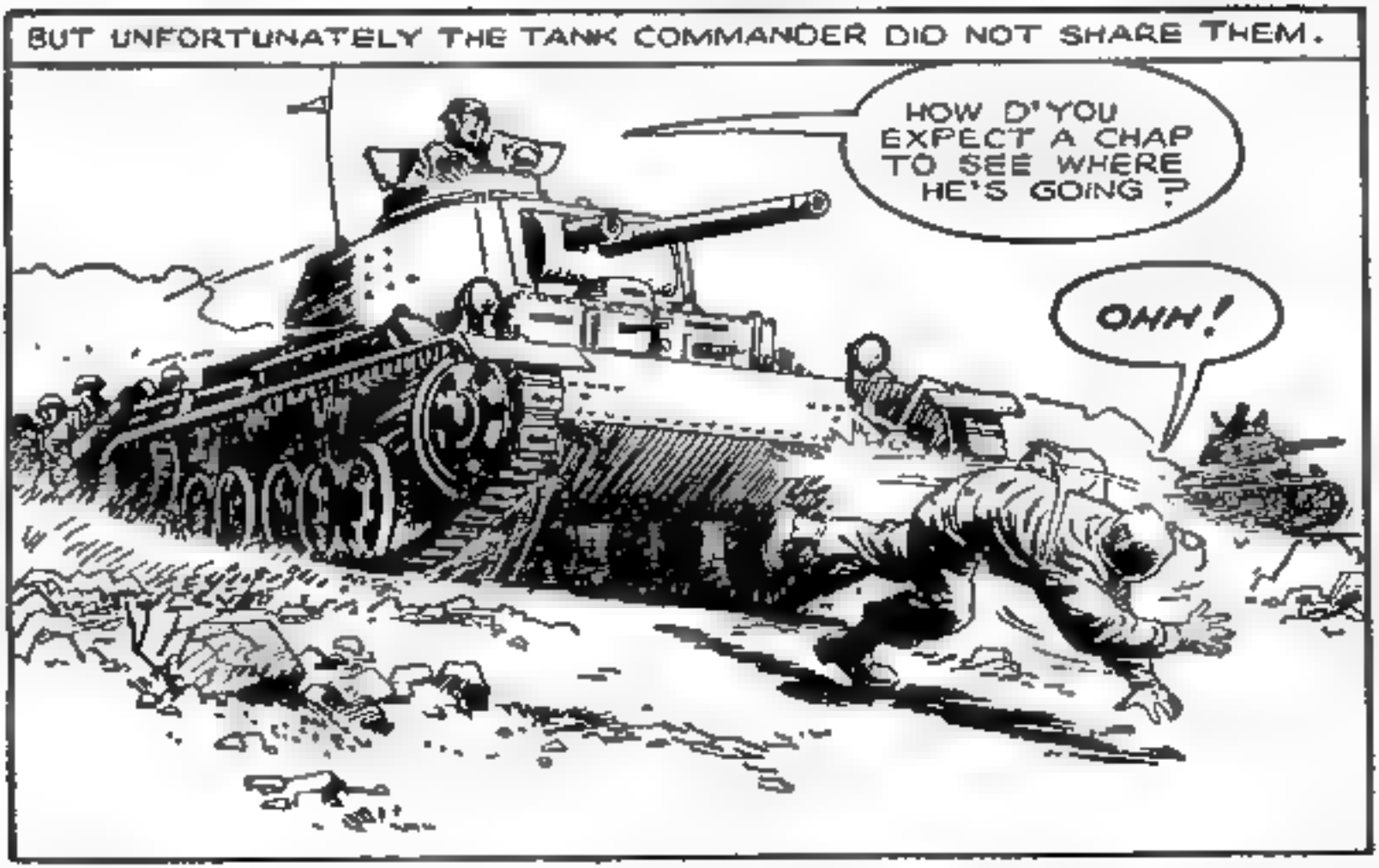
AT DAWN NEXT MORNING, THE THIRD WESSEX PREPARED TO LAUNCH THE ATTACK ON THE GERMAN-HELD REICHSWALD FOREST.
ZERO MINUS TEN! FORWARD COMPANIES TO START LINES!

THE STAFF OF *BATTLE FLAG* WERE READY, WILLING AND ABLE ...
GET READY, YOU TWO! THIS TIME WE'RE GOING TO MAKE HISTORY AS WELL AS REPORT IT! SYNCHRONISE YOUR WATCHES AND ALL THAT.

OSWALD BRIGHT'S FIRST STEP INTO BATTLE WAS ASSISTED BY THE TANK BEHIND HIM ...
IT'S ZERO HOUR, CHAPS. I SUPPOSE WE'D BETTER START MOVING.
CHARGE! OUFF!

CAPTAIN LIVERMORE'S UNROMANTIC ATTITUDE WAS A GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT TO OSWALD BRIGHT.
RIGHTO, CHAPS, KEEP BEHIND THE TANKS AS YOU GO FORWARD.
GOOD GRACIOUS, NO, CAPTAIN! THAT'S NOT THE WAY TO ADVANCE INTO BATTLE...

THE EDITOR HAD HIS OWN IDEAS ABOUT THE WAY TO LEAD MEN INTO BATTLE.
FORWARD, THE WESSEX! DEATH TO THE FOE!
I SAY-- DO YOU MIND...


BUT UNFORTUNATELY THE TANK COMMANDER DID NOT SHARE THEM.
HOW D'YOU EXPECT A CHAP TO SEE WHERE HE'S GOING ?
OHH!

THE THIRD WESSEX HAD REACHED THE FOREST AND SHELLFIRE WAS SCYTHING THROUGH THE TREES AROUND THEM.
NEVER MIND, ED...THINGS ARE HOTTING UP NOW. GET SOME ACTION PHOTOS!
YOU BET, OSSIE! WOW, THIS IS GOING TO BE THE REAL THING!

ED LEMMON, THE PHOTOGRAPHER, LOOKED ACROSS TO THE GERMAN GUN EMPLACEMENT WITH GLEAMING EYES.
OPEN UP, YOU DEVIL!
AH! SINGLE-HANDED HE STORMS THE GUN EMPLACEMENT WITH COLD STEEL. I MUST GET THIS!

HE RAISED HIS CAMERA -- AND LOWERED IT AGAIN WITH A GROAN.
OH HECK! HE'S ONLY OPENING A TIN!
TRYING TO, YOU MEAN! THIS BAYONET'S AS BLUNT AS MY FINGER!

AN ARMY MARCHED ON ITS STOMACH, ED KNEW, BUT THIS CHAP WAS GOING A BIT TOO FAR.
EAT WHEN YOU CAN, MATE, THAT'S WHAT I SAY! YOU NEVER KNOW WHERE YOUR NEXT MEAL'S COMING FROM IN THESE BLOOMING ADVANCES! HAVE SOME?
ER, NO THANKS I'VE GOT WORK TO DO ~~ I HOPE.

THEN HOPE BLOSSOMED AGAIN IN THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S EAGER EYES
QUICK, BLOKES! JERRY'S GOT A MORTAR NEST IN THAT COPSE AHEAD. FOLLOW ME!
AH! THE GRIZZLED SERGEANT LEADS HIS MEN INTO THE FLAMING MOUTHS OF THE GUNS! OSSIE WILL LOVE THIS!

HE RACED AFTER THE SOLDIERS INTO THE CLEARING... AND STOPPED SHORT...
THAT'S FUNNY! WHERE D.D THEY ALL DISAPPEAR TO?

IN SERGEANT TRUGG'S VIEW, DISCRETION WAS THE BETTER PART OF VALOUR
OH...NO!
YOU WANT YOUR HEAD TESTED, MATE! STANDING UP THERE WITH ALL THAT IRONMONGERY FLYING AROUND.

GLUMLY, ED LEMMON RETURNED TO HIS EDITOR.
THIS REAL LIFE BATTLE S A DEAD LOSS, OSSIE! I HAVEN'T GOT A SINGLE SHOT YET!
DASH IT, THERE MUST BE SOME EXCITING COPY AROUND SOMEWHERE! SEE WHAT YOU CAN FIND, CHARLIE...

IT LOOKED AS THOUGH CHARLIE SAGE, THE REPORTER, WOULD HAVE MORE LUCK...
NO, NO, CEDRIC! I TELL YOU YOU'RE WRONG!
AH! THIS IS WHAT OSSIE HAD IN MIND! TWO OFFICERS DISCUSS THE DESPERATE SITUATION!

BUT THE DESPERATE SITUATION THE OFFICERS WERE DISCUSSING HAD HAPPENED AT THE OVAL SIX SUMMERS BEFORE...
IT WAS DENNIS COMPTON WHO CAUGHT BRADMAN AT SILLY MID-OFF!
NO, IT WASN'T! COMPTON WAS BOWLING! IT WAS WALLY HAMMOND AT SHORT THIRD MAN!
GOOD GRIEF!

W.P.L.—252

CHARLIE WAS TURNING AWAY, DISCOURAGED, WHEN HOPE ROSE AGAIN.
BRING THE DOINGS, MATES--THERE'S A JERRY TANK...
AN ACTION AT LAST!
NOTEBOOK AT THE READY, CHARLIE HURRIED FORWARD.
QUICK, CORP! BREW IT UP!
THE FLAMES LEAP HIGH AS THE VALIANT HANDFUL OF MEN SET FIRE TO THE ENEMY TANK... GOSH, THIS IS FRONT PAGE STUFF, ALL RIGHT!
BUT IT WAS NOT THE TANK THE SOLDIERS WERE BREWING -- IT WAS TEA...
THIS WRECKED TANK KEEPS THE WIND OFF A TREAT, BLOKES! WE'LL SOON HAVE THAT CUP OF CHAR!
I GIVE UP!

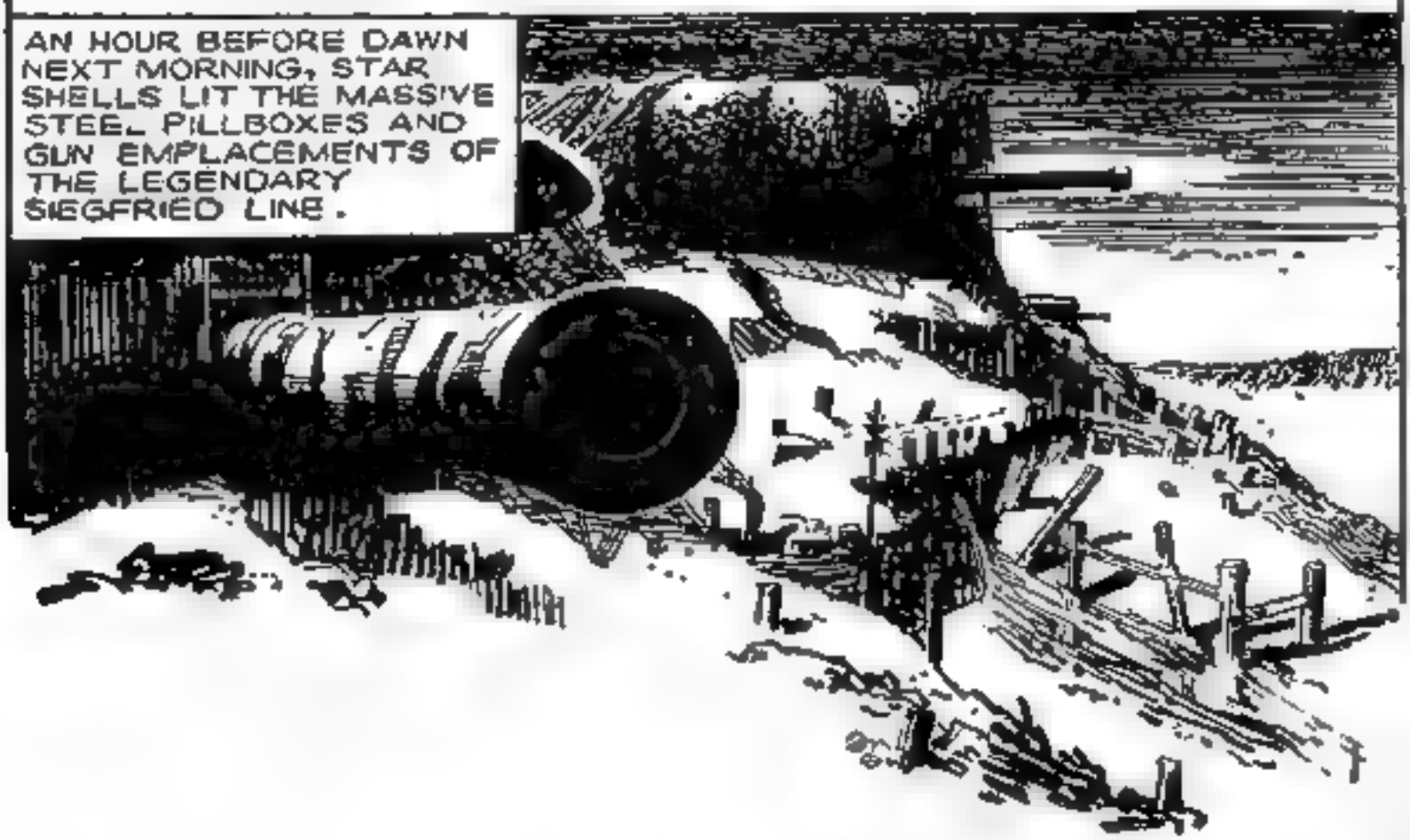
THE REALITY OF WAR HAD BEEN A BIG DISAPPOINTMENT TO THE STAFF OF BATTLE FLAG...
IT'S NO GOOD, OSSIE! WE'VE JUST GOT TO FACE IT--THIS ATTACK AT DAWN LARK ISN'T WHAT IT'S CRACKED UP TO BE!
NO, NO, CHARLIE! DON'T SAY THAT...

AT THAT MOMENT, GENERAL CALDICOTT ARRIVED--AND HIS WORDS GAVE OSWALD FRESH HOPE...
GOOD SHOW, CAPTAIN, WE'VE REACHED OUR OBJECTIVE FOR THE DAY. TOMORROW WE SHALL MOVE UP FOR AN ALL-OUT ASSAULT ON THE SIEGFRIED LINE.
AHA!

THE GENERAL HAD NOT FORGOTTEN HIS HARROWING EXPERIENCE IN PARIS.
SO IT'S YOU, M'ISTER EDITOR! I HOPE YOU'VE BEEN FINDING OUT WHAT BATTLE IS REALLY LIKE!
YES, WE HAVE, GENERAL! ACTUALLY IT'S BEEN A BIT DISAPPOINTING SO FAR.

OSWALD BRIGHT'S BELIEF IN THE GLORIES OF BATTLE HAD NOT BEEN SHAKEN, HOWEVER.
BUT TOMORROW-- AN ALL-OUT ASSAULT ON THE SIEGFRIED LINE! MY WORD, THAT'LL REALLY GIVE US A RED-HOT FRONT PAGE STORY!

Chapter 4. Glorious War

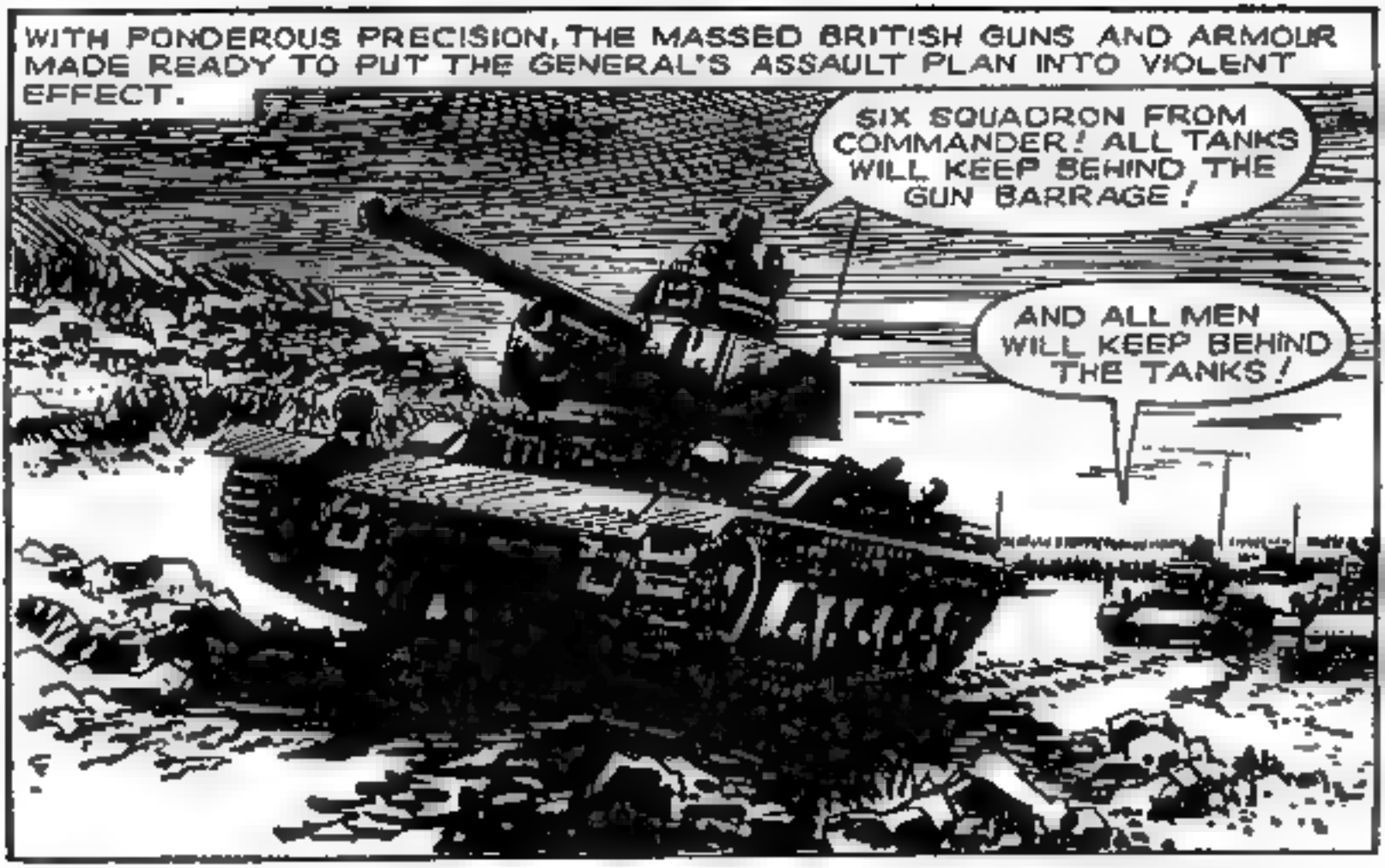


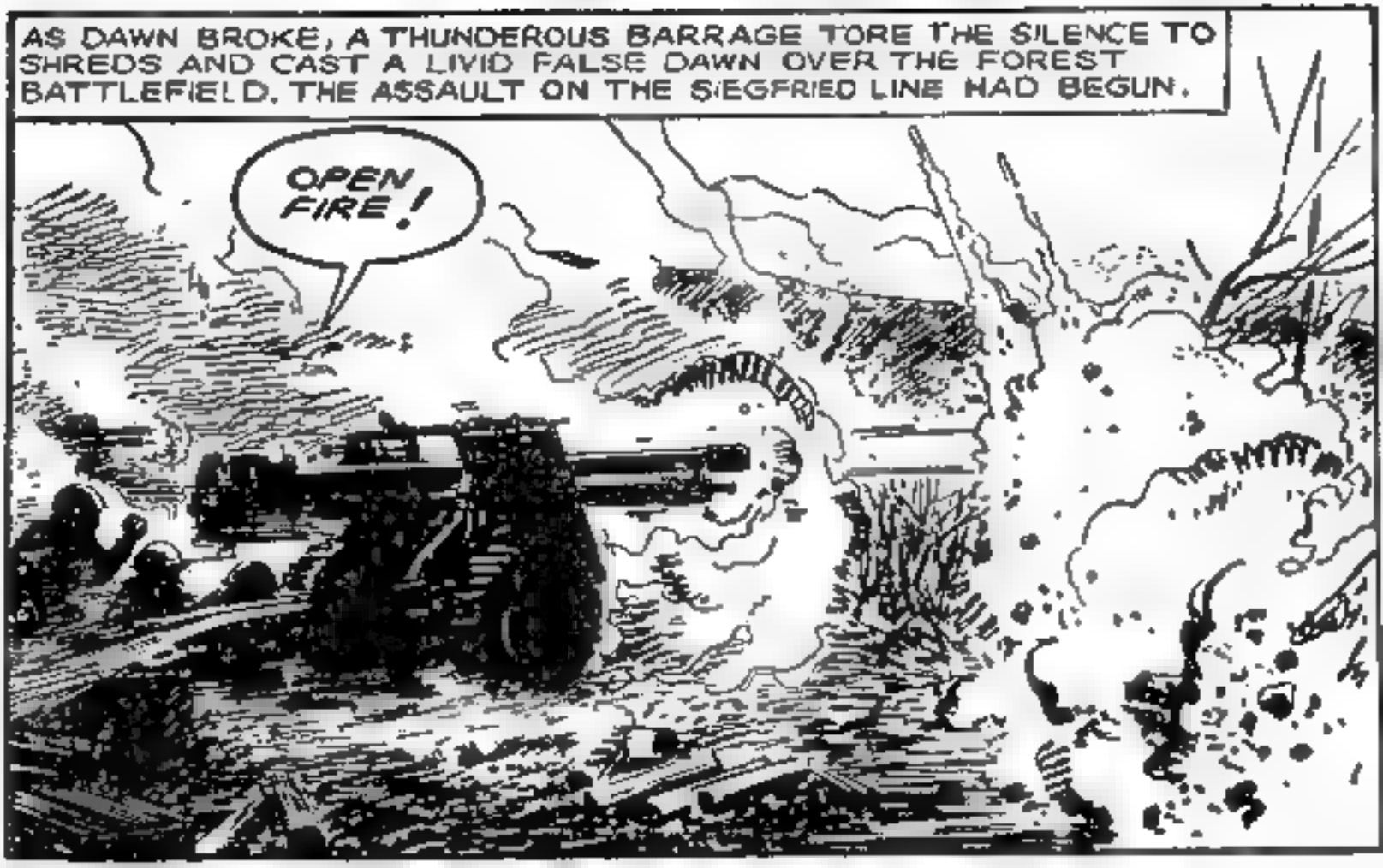
AS THE GENERAL SPOKE, THE BATTERIES OF BIG GUNS SWUNG INTO POSITION, THEIR MUZZLES POINTING TOWARDS GERMANY.
FIRST OF ALL, THE GUNS WILL LAY DOWN A CARPET OF HIGH EXPLOSIVE! I ESTIMATE TWELVE HOURS FOR THEM TO SOFTEN UP THE GERMAN FORTIFICATIONS FOR THE TANKS.

SERRIED SQUADRONS OF TANKS RUMBLED FORWARD TO THE START LINES.
...THEN THE TANKS WILL GO IN! IT WILL TAKE THEM TWELVE MORE HOURS TO BREACH THE GERMAN PILLBOXES! AS FOR THE MEN...

THE EDITOR OF BATTLE FLAG DID NOT HEAR THE GENERAL'S REMARKS, AND PERHAPS IT WAS JUST AS WELL.
THE MEN WILL BE SUPERFLUOUS IN THIS OPERATION! THIS WILL BE A BATTLE OF GUNS AND ARMOUR, NOT OF FLESH AND BLOOD! THE MEN CAN MOP UP AFTER IT'S ALL OVER!
COME ON, YOU TWO, LET'S GET READY! WE SHALL SOON BE LOCKED IN MORTAL COMBAT!

FOR OSWALD BRIGHT HAD MADE HIS OWN PREPARATIONS, WITH A NEEDLE AND THREAD, FOR THE COMING BATTLE.
THERE! NOW I'M READY TO STORM INTO THE TEETH OF THE ENEMY!
OKAY, CHAPS? LET'S GET ON WITH THE CHORE, THEN, SHALL WE?


WITH PONDEROUS PRECISION, THE MASSED BRITISH GUNS AND ARMOUR MADE READY TO PUT THE GENERAL'S ASSAULT PLAN INTO VIOLENT EFFECT.
SIX SQUADRON FROM COMMANDER! ALL TANKS WILL KEEP BEHIND THE GUN BARRAGE!
AND ALL MEN WILL KEEP BEHIND THE TANKS!


AS DAWN BROKE, A THUNDEROUS BARRAGE TORE THE SILENCE TO SHREDS AND CAST A LIVID FALSE DAWN OVER THE FOREST BATTLEFIELD. THE ASSAULT ON THE SIEGFRIED LINE HAD BEGUN.
OPEN FIRE!

THE MEN OF "D" COMPANY, THE THIRD WESSEX RIFLES, MERE PAWNS IN THE GENERAL'S PLANS, SHUFFLED SLOWLY FORWARD BEHIND THE TANKS.

I SAY, CAPTAIN, WHEN ARE WE GOING TO ADVANCE?

ARE YOU BEING FUNNY AGAIN, MY MAN? WE ARE ADVANCING!

BUT THE EDITOR OF *BATTLE FLAG* HAD NO INTENTION OF BEING A PAWN.

NO. THIS IS TOO MUCH! WE'VE BEEN THROUGH ALL THIS BEFORE! THESE CHAPS JUST DON'T KNOW HOW TO PUT ON A BATTLE! WELL, I'LL JOLLY WELL SHOW THEM!

WAVING A VALIANT ARM IN THE AIR, OSWALD BRIGHT GALLOPED FORWARD. THE ONLY THING HE LACKED WAS A RAISED SWORD AND A FLAG.

UP THE WESSEX! DEATH TO THE ENEMY! CHARGE!

PRIVATE COLLEY SAW WITH ALARM AND DISMAY THE LONELY LITTLE FIGURE CHARGING OFF INTO THE DAWN.
FOLLOW ME, MY BRAVE LADS! FORWARD!
LUMME! OLD OSWALD'S TAKING OFF ON HIS OWN! HE'LL DO HIMSELF AN INJURY! I'VE GOT TO STOP HIM!

WITH THE SAME ALARM AND DISMAY, PRIVATE EVANS AND THE MEN OF "D" COMPANY SAW PRIVATE COLLEY CHARGING FORWARD.
COME BACK, MISTER BRIGHT!
COR, OLD COLLEY'S BELTING FORWARD, BLOKES! HE MUST HAVE DONE HIS NUT! WE'D BETTER STOP HIM!

CAPTAIN LIVERMORE AND SERGEANT TRUGG WERE NEXT TO JOIN THE PROCESSION ...

I SAY, THE MEN ARE RUNNING, TRUGG! WE CAN'T HAVE THAT! WHAT WOULD THE GENERAL SAY? WE'VE GOT TO STOP THEM ...

COME BACK, COLLEY!

THE SIGHT OF THE RAPIDLY-ADVANCING CAPTAIN WAS TOO MUCH FOR THE REST OF THE BRITISH INFANTRY. THEY TOOK ONE LOOK AND BRAVELY FOLLOWED SUIT.

COME BACK, MEN!

LOOK, MATES! THE CAPTAIN'S LEADING A CHARGE! ARE WE GOING TO STAND BACK WHILE HE GOES IT ALONE?

IN A FEW MINUTES, THE EDITOR OF *BATTLE FLAG* HAD STARTED A WHOLE BRITISH INFANTRY REGIMENT ON A WILD GALLOP INTO GLORY.

FORWARD!

COME BACK!

HURRAY!

THE GERMANS IN THE ENEMY FORWARD TRENCHES WERE TAKEN UTTERLY BY SURPRISE
THE WESSEX FOR EVER! ONWARD!
TEUFEL! THESE ENGLANDERS! THEY TREAT WAR LIKE A GAME— AND ON TOP OF THAT THEY BEND THE RULES!

BY THIS TIME OSWALD BRIGHT'S HOT FERVOUR HAD COMMUNICATED TSELF TO PRIVATE COLLEY AND THE REST OF THE CHARGING MEN.
STONE ME! WE'VE MADE THE JERRY FORWARD TRENCHES! OLD OSWALD'S RIGHT! WHY STOP HERE, BLOKES?
YOU SAID A MOUTHFUL, COLLEY! FORWARD!

AS THE MOB OF CHEERING SOLDERS DASHED FORWARD, ED LEMMON CLICKED HIS SHUTTER EXCITEDLY.
LET ME SEE.. THEY'RE RUNNING PRETTY FAST... A TWO-FIFTIETH AT F-ELEVEN SHOULD DO IT...
CHARGE!

EVEN THE LANGUID CAPTAIN LIVERMORE WAS SEIZED BY A WILD EXHILARATION.
HERE, CAPTAIN, THERE'S HALF THE ARMY FOLLOWING US! HOW ARE WE GOING TO GET THEM ALL BACK?
WE AREN'T, TRUGG! THIS IS MARVELLOUS! I HAVE NOT ENJOYED MYSELF SO MUCH SINCE SANDHURST! UP THE WESSEX!

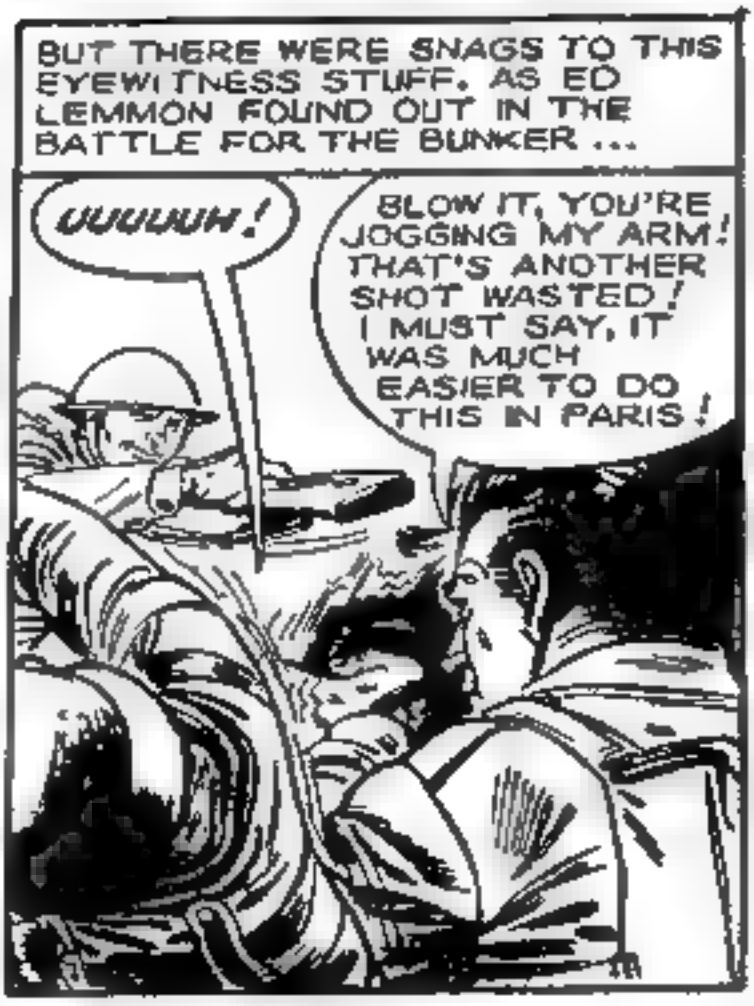
STRAIGHT ACROSS THE BATTLEFIELD LIKE A TORRENT OF FIRE SWEPT OSWALD BRIGHT'S IMPROMPTU ARMY.
THERE'S THE SIEGFRIED LINE, COLLEY! WHY AREN'T THE JERRIES GUNNING US?
SEARCH ME, TAFF! I RECKON OLD OSWALD'S SHAKEN THEM RIGID! COME ON!

THE GERMANS IN THE SIEGFRIED LINE COULD NOT BE EXPECTED TO KNOW THAT A MAN OF OSWALD BRIGHT'S LURID IMAGINATION WAS FACING THEM.
TH-THEY LOOK LIKE ENGLANDERS, HERR OBERST!
NONSENSE! NOT EVEN THE ENGLANDERS ARE MAD ENOUGH TO ATTACK A FORTIFIED POSITION ACROSS OPEN GROUND! THEY MUST BE OUR OWN MEN! GO AND LET THEM IN!

AS THE HAUPTMANN SWUNG OPEN THE HEAVY DOOR OF THE BUNKER, A FIERCE LITTLE FIGURE CHARGED DOWN ON HIM WITH A BLOODCURDLING SHOUT.
AHA! HAVE AT YOU, BOCHE! SURRENDER OR DIE!
AAACH!

NTO THE HEART OF THE MASSIVE GERMAN DEFENCES SWEPT OSWALD BRIGHT AND HIS FIERY-HEARTED FOLLOWERS.
FORWARD!
CLOBBER THEM, BLOKES!
NEIN, NEIN! THIS IS AN IMPREGNABLE POSITION! THERE MUST BE A RULE WHICH FORBIDS THIS!

THE STAFF OF BATTLE FLAG HAD BEEN WORKING OVERTIME.
EEEGH!
AAGH!
PHEW! I'VE USED UP ALL MY NOTEBOOKS, ED!
AND MY CAMERA'S RED-HOT, CHARLIE!


BUT THERE WERE SNAGS TO THIS EYEWITNESS STUFF. AS ED LEMMON FOUND OUT IN THE BATTLE FOR THE BUNKER ...
UUUUUH!
BLOW IT, YOU'RE JOGGING MY ARM! THAT'S ANOTHER SHOT WASTED! I MUST SAY, IT WAS MUCH EASIER TO DO THIS IN PARIS!

CHARLIE SAGE, TOO, WAS HAVING HIS DIFFICULTIES AS THE UNDERGROUND BATTLE RAGED
UGH!
HERE, LOOK OUT! HOW CAN A CHAP CONCENTRATE?! I DIDN'T HAVE CLUMSY CLOTS FALLING OVER MY TYPEWRITER IN PARIS!

BUT THE DEMORALISED GERMANS WERE NO MATCH FOR THE THIRD WESSEX ON THAT INSPIRED AND MEMORABLE DAY.
KAPUT!
MERCY! WE GIVE IN!
ABOUT TIME, TOO! LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE TO MY FRONT PAGE LEAD!

THE MAN WHO HAD DONE THE INSPIRING WAS READY NOW TO REAP THE REWARD OF HIS PRE-BATTLE PREPARATIONS.

I SAY, ED, IF YOU'VE GOT ANY FILM LEFT, THERE'S ONE MORE SHOT I'D LIKE YOU TO TAKE.

OH DEAR, TRUGG, I'VE JUST REMEMBERED -- SOMEONE'S GOT TO BREAK THE NEWS TO THE GENERAL!

OSWALD BRIGHT TURNED WITH A CROOKED SMILE AS CAPTAIN LIVERMORE GOT BRITISH HEADQUARTERS ON THE RADIO.

ER YES, GENERAL. THAT *IS* WHAT I SAID. I'M AWFULLY SORRY, SIR -- ***BUT WE'VE GONE AND CAPTURED THE SIEGFRIED LINE!***

NOW, NOW, CAPTAIN! WE NEVER EXAGGERATE ON *BATTLE FLAG!* WE'VE ONLY CAPTURED PART OF IT!

GENERAL CALDICOTT SNATCHED UP HIS CAP WITH A SNARL.

BUT THEY CAN'T DO THAT, SIR! WHAT ABOUT YOUR PLAN?

THEY HAVE DONE IT, SMITHERS! AND MY PLAN'S GONE UP IN SMOKE! TWENTY-FOUR HOURS I SAID THIS BATTLE WOULD LAST... AND THEY'VE FINISHED IT IN TWENTY-FOUR MINUTES, CONFOUND THEM!

THE GENERAL'S JEEP RACED FORWARD ACROSS THE GROUND SO DEVASTATINGLY CAPTURED BY THE THIRD WESSEX.
NOW, WHERE IS THE SCOUNDREL WHO TURNED MY NICE ORDERLY BATTLEFIELD TOPSY-TURVY?
ER...THAT WOULDN'T BE HIM UP THERE, WOULD IT, GENERAL?

ON THE SUMMIT OF THE SIEGFRIED LINE, OSWALD BRIGHT WAS POSING WITH THE UNION JACK HE HAD STITCHED WITH HIS OWN HANDS THAT MORNING.
HOW'S THAT, ED? OF COURSE, THIS IS JUST FOR MY PRIVATE ALBUM!
SPOT-ON, OSSIE! IT'D MAKE A SUPER COVER FOR BATTLE FLAG, THOUGH!

GENERAL CALDICOTT HAD NO CHOICE. A SPECTACULAR MILITARY VICTORY HAD BEEN ACHIEVED UNDER HIS COMMAND, EVEN IF IN DEFIANCE OF HIS ORDERS...
WELL, MISTER BRIGHT, I SUPPOSE I MUST--ER--CONGRATULATE YOU ON AN--ER--SPLENDID FEAT OF ARMS.
OH, ANY TIME YOU WANT OUR HELP, GENERAL.

THE GENERAL WAS A MASTER TACTICIAN, BUT THE STAFF OF BATTLE FLAG LOOKED LIKE BEING MORE THAN HE COULD HANDLE.
NO, NO, MISTER BRIGHT! I WOULDN'T THINK OF KEEPING YOU AND YOUR VALUABLE STAFF FROM YOUR DESKS ANY LONGER! I INSIST ON YOUR RETURNING TO PARIS AT ONCE AND STAYING THERE!

A MONTH OR TWO LATER, ONE SUNNY DAY IN THE SPRING, TWO BRITISH INFANTRYMEN WERE ON LEAVE IN PARIS...
HERE, TAFF, THAT'S THE RUE DE LA WHAT'S IT DOWN THERE--YOU KNOW, WHERE BATTLE FLAG HANGS OUT!
COR, IS IT? WHY DON'T WE LOOK UP OLD OSWALD, THEN?

PRIVATES COLLEY AND EVANS GRINNED AT EACH OTHER AS THEY REACHED THE LITTLE GATE IN THE WALL.
THOSE NEWSHOUNDS HAVE GOT IT TAPED, EH, COLLEY ?
YEAH, TAFF ! TAKING IT NICE AND EASY--HERE IN THE PEACE AND QJIET OF PARIS ...
TLE FLAG
ITORIAL
OFFICE

BUT AS THEY SWUNG OPEN THE GATE IN THE WALL THE SOUND AND FURY OF BATTLE ENVELOPED THEM.
HOLD IT, CHAPS ! A LITTLE MORE EXPRESSION ... SPOT-ON !
UUUUH !
WHAT THE HECK ?

COLLEY AND EVANS PLUNGED AFTER THE PHOTOGRAPHER THROUGH THE CRUSH OF THE MINIATURE BATTLEFIELD.

GOSH, IT'S COLLEY AND TAFF! THIS IS WONDERFUL!

IT'S BLINKING INCREDIBLE! HERE, WHAT'S GOING ON, ED?

BUT ED LEMMON HELD A FINGER TO HIS LIPS AS THEY REACHED THE CORRIDOR ABOVE THE COURTYARD.

CHARLIE SAGE WAS ALSO BACK AT WORK...

...AS THE STUKAS DRONE AWAY, LEAVING THE TRENCH IN WHICH I AM LYING A BROKEN, BATTERED, BURNING SHAMBLES...

COR! WHAT AN IMAGINATION!

OSWALD BRIGHT SWUNG ROUND JOYFULLY AS THE TWO INFANTRYMEN STUMPED INTO HIS OFFICE.

HERE, OSSIE-- LOOK WHO'S TURNED UP!

COLLEY, TAFF! MY OLD COMRADES-IN-ARMS!

PRIVATE COLLEY GRINNED DOWN AT THE LITTLE EDITOR.
COLLEY WAS JUST SAYING WHAT LURID IMAGINATIONS WE HAD ON BATTLE FLAG, OSSIE!
NO OFFENCE, OSWALD, BUT I MEAN TO SAY! ED PHOTOGRAPHING BATTLES IN THE BACK YARD! CHARLIE WITH HIS FEET ON THE DESK WRITING HIS STORY WITH HIS FINGERNAIL!

OSWALD BRIGHT RETURNED THE GRIN WITH QUIET CONFIDENCE
WELL, PERHAPS WE DO STRETCH THINGS A POINT OR TWO, COLLEY! BUT YOU SEE, IT'S MUCH EASIER TO ORGANISE THE WHOLE THING HERE IN PARIS! AFTER ALL, BATTLES DO HAPPEN IN JUST THE WAY WE SAY THEY DO...

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